

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 17960

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJECT: POLITICAL CONTEST IN WEST BENGAL

FOL SENT ACTION NDELHI PRIORITY, INFO BOMBAY, MADRAS
RPTD YOUR INFO DTD DEC 13, FROM CALCUTTA SIGNED KORN

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L CALCUTTA 3069

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJ: POLITICAL CONTEST IN WEST BENGAL

1. SUMMARY: THE CENTER FACES THE CHOICE OF CALLING
OFF THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST RAY, DECLARING PRESIDENT'S
RULE, OR ALLOWING THE CURRENT POLITICAL AGITATION TO
CONTINUE. THE FIRST WOULD BE THE EASIEST AND LEAST
DISRUPTIVE COURSE, BUT IT WOULD BE A DEFEAT FOR SANJAY
GANDHI AND HIS PEOPLE IN THE STATE. THE LAST WOULD
MEAN CONTINUED PARALYSIS OF THE STATE ADMINISTRATION
AND VERY LIKELY VIOLENCE BETWEEN THE PRO AND ANTI-
RAY BLOCS. RIGHT NOW PRESIDENT'S RULE SEEMS THE MOST
LIKELY COURSE, THOUGH IT IS PROBABLY A FEW WEEKS OFF AND
RAY - WHO HAS A REMARKABLE SURVIVAL RECORD - COULD
STILL PULL THROUGH. END SUMMARY.

2. THE FRONT PUT TOGETHER BY CHIEF MINISTER S.S. RAY'S
SUPPORTERS FROM THE LEFT AND CENTER RANKS OF THE WEST
BENGAL CONGRESS HAS HELD AND GROWN IN STRENGTH THIS PAST
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WEEK. RAY HAS VERY ASTUTELY PLAYED ON THE PERSONAL

RIVALRIES OF THE LEADERS OF THE VARIOUS PARTY FACTIONS, WHILE THE STRONG ARM METHODS OF THE PRINCIPAL ORCHESTRATOR OF THE OPPOSITION, KAMAL NATH, HAVE ALIENATED MANY. MOREOVER, DAS MUNSHI AND L.K. BOSE (WHO COMPRISE THE CORE OF RAY'S BACKIN), AFTER FIRING A FEW SHOTS AT SANJAY GANDHI EARLY LAST WEEK HAVE FOR THE MOMENT ABANDONED THAT TACTIC, APPARENTLY RECOGNIZING ITS DANGERS. RAY NOW HAS THE SUPPORT OF A CLEAR MAJORITY IN THE WEST BENGAL CONGRESS, A MAJOR IMPROVEMENT OVER HIS POSITION OF A MONTH OR TWO AGO. HIS STRENGTH IS SUCH THAT TODAY HE COULD NOT BE VOTED OUT OF OFFICE BY A PARTY CAUCUS OR BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY UNLESS MRS GANDHI WERE TO COME OUT PUBLICLY AGAINST HIM. RAY ALSO ENJOYS THE BACKING OF A LARGE SEGMENT OF THE CALCUTTA BUSINESS COMMUNITY.

3. FOR ALL THIS, THE CENTER/RIGHT COALITION AND THE WEST BENGAL CONGRESS THAT SEEKS RAY'S DISMISSAL IS STILL POWERFUL. THUS FAR ITS LEADERS HAVE NOT BEEN DETERRED BY THEIR FAILURE TO BRING RAY DOWN AND THEY CONTINUE THEIR AGITATION. IN SO DOING THEY HAVE SUCCEEDED IN ACHIEVING AT LEAST ONE IMPORTANT GOAL: THE STATE ADMINISTRATION HAS BEEN PARALYZED AND A SITUATION HAS BEEN CREATED IN WHICH IT CAN RIGHTLY BE CLAIMED - AS LONG AS RAY'S OPPONENTS PURSUE THEIR CAMPAIGN AGAINST HIM - THAT THE CHIEF MINISTER CAN NO LONGER GOVERN EFFECTIVELY. THIS LEAVES THE CENTER THE CHOICE OF DECLARING PRESIDENT'S RULE, OR OF CALLING OFF THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST RAY, OR OF ALLOWING THE CURRENT AGITATION TO CONTINUE. RAY'S OPPONENTS ARE NOW SAYING OPENLY THAT PRESIDENT'S RULE IS IN THE OFFING.

4. THOUGH RAY IS ITS SYMBOL, THE CURRENT POLITICAL CONTEST IN WEST BENGAL REMAINS, BROADLY SPEAKING, A STRUGGLE BETWEEN SANJAY GANDHI'S PEOPLE IN THE STATE AND LEFTIST AND CENTER ELEMENTS BOTH IN AND OUTSIDE THE STATE CONGRESS PARTY (I.E. THE CPI) WHO WANT TO STEP SANJAY IN WEST BENGAL, WHERE THEY FEEL STRONGEST AND BEST ABLE TO DO SO. THIS IS NOT TRUE FOR ALL THOSE INVOLVED - SOME HAVE LINED UP WITH ONE SIDE SIMPLY BECAUSE THEIR PARTICULAR RIVALS WERE ON THE OTHER - AND NOT EVERYONE WILL

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ADMIT HIS MOTIVES, BUT IT IS ACCURATE AS A GENERALIZATION. DAS MUNSHI AND HIS FOLLOWERS CONTINUE TO ACKNOWLEDGE PRIVATELY THAT THEIR GOAL IS TO DEAL SANJAY A SETBACK AND ULTIMATELY TO REMOVE HIM FROM THE POLITICAL SCENE (THE LATTER MAY SOUND FOOLISHLY AMBITIOUS BUT IT IS WHAT OUR FSLs ARE BEING TOLD BY DAS MUNSHI'S PEOPLE). THE AGITATION AGAINST RAY COULD EASILY BE CALLED OFF BY SANJAY, FOR IT CONTINUES AT HIS ORDER (SANJAY'S MAN KAMAL

NATH OPENLY ACKNOWLEDGES THIS). THUS THE CENTER COULD IF IT WANTED END THE CRISIS IN WEST BENGAL AND SIMPLY ALLOW RAY TO REMAIN CHIEF MINISTER. FOR THE STATE, THIS WOULD BE THE EASIEST, LEAST DISRUPTIVE AND PROBABLY MOST BENEFICIAL COURSE, BUT IT WOULD BE A DEFEAT FOR SANJAY AND HIS FOLLOWERS. CONTINUATION OF THE AGITATION WOULD BE DANGEROUS FOR THE STATE - IT COULD WELL DEGENERATE INTO VIOLENCE BETWEEN THE TWO BLOCS - AND HOLDS NO PROMISE OF SOLUTION.

5. THE REMAINING OPTION IS PRESIDENT'S RULE. IT WOULD NOT OFFER AN IMMEDIATE SOLUTION TO THE STATE CONGRESS' DIFFICULTIES. THERE IS LITTLE LIKELIHOOD THAT THERE COULD BE EARLY AGREEMENT IN THE PARTY ON A SUCCESSOR TO RAY: BY ALL ACCOUNTS ONLY FORMER LAW MINISTER ASHOKE SEN COULD COMMAND THE SUPPORT OF ENOUGH OF THE STATE CONGRESS TO PUT TOGETHER A NEW CABINET, BUT UP TO NOW SEN HAS REFUSED ALL ENTREATIES TO TRY. BY ALL ESTIMATES PRESIDENT'S RULE WOULD LAST SEVERAL MONTHS AT THE LEAST. THE DANGER OF LEFTIST AGITATION WOULD BE LESS BUT STILL THERE. AND EVEN IF SUCCESSFUL PRESIDENT'S RULE WOULD GIVE PUBLIC EVIDENCE OF THE CONGRESS PARTY'S INCAPACITY AND - BY BRINGING A THIRD STATE (A FOURTH IF ORISSA PRECEEDS WEST BENGAL THERE) UNDER THAT REGIME - OF THE TREND TOWARD GOVERNMENT BY THE CENTER. ITS MAIN VIRTUE WOULD BE THAT OF PERMITTING SANJAY AND HIS FOLLOWERS TO CLAIM VICTORY (WITHOUT HAVING ACTUALLY WON THE CONTEST IN THE STATE) AND OF RESTORING, TEMPORARILY AT LEAST, THE WORKING PROCESSES OF THE STATE GOVERNMENT.

6. MRS SATPATHY'S TROUBLES IN ORISSA HAVE PROBABLY GIVEN RAY A REPRIEVE, THOUGH FOR HOW LONG IT IS HARD TO TELL. THIS PAST WEEKEND RAY THREW OFF HIS PRETENDED NEUTRALITY
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AND LED TWO RALLIES OF HIS SUPPORTERS IN BIRBHUM (A DISTRICT IN THE WESTERN PART OF THE STATE), A SIGN OF HIS INCREASING SELF-ASSURANCE. RAY HAS A REMARKABLE SURVIVAL RECORD, AND HE COULD YET PULL THROUGH, THOUGH RIGHT NOW THE GENERAL VIEW IS THAT THE STATE IS PROBABLY HEADED FOR PRESIDENT'S RULE WITHIN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS.

KORN
UNQUOTE SCHNEIDER

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